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SOVIET MAN TODAY

—Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn

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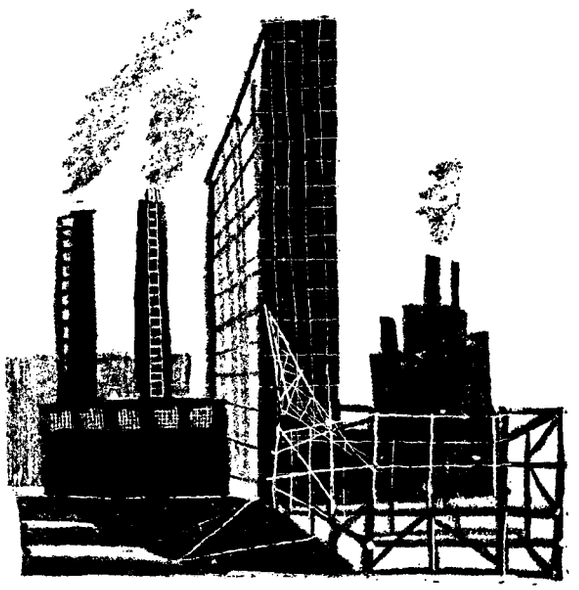

The UN—Ten Years Later

by Archbishop Robert E. Lucey

Colonialism, Belgian Style

by William Pfaff

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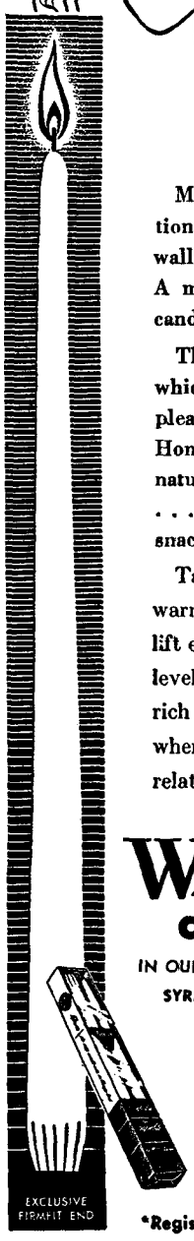

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The Commonweal

week by week

WORKING FOR PEACE

BY now, most Americans have probably forgotten Gary Davis. A few years ago, though, Davis was in all the papers. He was the young American who for a while became a man without a country, a citizen of the world, by the simple expedient of "losing" his passport. The U.S. press tended to treat him as something of a crackpot, and his performance was certainly melodramatic enough. But he did succeed in illustrating how high are the walls of nationalism.

Those walls still stand, and they are not likely to go tumbling down in the near future. But it is important that someone like Gary Davis come along every once in a while to dramatize an important truth. Nations do not have to be separated from each other by walls, and the man who works for peace must try to break down the barriers of fear and suspicion which separate nations one from another.

In this issue, Archbishop Robert E. Lucey discusses the United Nations ten years after its founding. We are pleased to have in our pages an article on this subject by such a distinguished American prelate, and we think Archbishop Lucey's approach to the problem provides a clue to what we must all do if we are ever to achieve peace in the world.

In the present situation, it is difficult to think much about the long-range prospects for peace—if only because Soviet intransigence has been such that no man can say what shock tomorrow will bring. Yet we cannot be immobilized by the existence of the Soviet Union. Peace will not come of itself. And it is essential that we in the United States look beyond the immediacies of the cold war to the future.

The walls between nations are high and often well nigh impassable, but the world itself has become smaller. In one sense, rich and powerful nations like the United States are in a separate world, knowing little of the problems and poverty of nations which are called backward or underdeveloped. In another sense, because communications are so developed and air-travel so fast, all nations are next-door neighbors. There have always been poor nations and hungry people, but poor nations now know they are poor, and the hungry know that others have plenty. The underfed millions stand outside and stare through the show-windows at the plenty of the United States, spread out for all to see.

Above all, the discovery of nuclear weapons has made the world small. It is now quite possible to lay waste an entire civilization in a matter of hours. Sometimes it seems as if we forget or ignore this paramount fact. For a while, we in the U.S. were the sole custodians of this awful new power; we were at the time somewhat burdened by the responsibility, but we felt safe, anyway. Then the Soviet Union came up with its own battery of thermonuclear weapons. Now two great powers confront each other in an attitude of potential combat, each armed with this terrible power.

THE present situation is thus bad enough, but what comes next? The nuclear status quo is not going to remain unchanged indefinitely. Great Britain is going ahead with its own H-bomb program, and others are sure to follow. What happens when France has the H-bomb, and Germany, and Italy, and China, and Japan? What happens when the small nations, like the great ones, possess the awesome veto power of the H-bomb? It seems inevitable that the H-bomb must help to make brothers of us all in life, if it is not to make us brothers in death.

There are two aspects to the problem with which we are immediately confronted. One is created by the existence in Russia of an aggressive totalitarian system. If the idea of coexistence is given the Russian meaning, we in the United States can have none of it. For the Russians use the term in a way that would imply acquiescence in the acts of aggression and enslavement of which the Soviet has been guilty. But if the term means that the

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two systems do as a matter of fact exist in the same world, and that both are likely to go on existing in the foreseeable future—that is not a theory; it is a fact. And we see no sense in closing our eyes to a fact, however unpleasant. The present Soviet enslavement of captive peoples is an evil; attempting now to undo this fact by our military power would constitute a greater evil.

What course is then open to us? It is true that we must continue the way we are going, and with renewed resolution, but we must also display more imagination and a better grasp of a rapidly changing situation. If the years ahead are to constitute a state of armed truce, with occasional border skirmishes, we must increase our efforts to build peace in the world by non-military means. We must hold the alliance of the free nations together; we must not be gulled into withdrawing to our own borders from any mistaken sense that all is well. But since the Soviet Union is responsible for only part of the obstacles to building a world of peace and justice, we must give more attention to the tasks of peace which can be undertaken now.

In this picture, the United Nations plays a vital role. There was once a time when the major nations shared the same values. It was then possible to speak of Christendom as an entity with real meaning. In such a period, although machinery for the settlement of problems between nations would have been good, it was not vital. But in an age when nations are not united in holding one set of values and beliefs, the existence of formal institutions to work out problems between nations is essential. It may be that too much cannot be asked of the UN at this stage of its development, but it is stronger than we usually think. The United States should make every effort to strengthen it still further and to make it more ready to deal with ever-larger problems.

Working as far as possible within the framework of the United Nations, we should turn more of our attention to the obstacles to peace we are able to deal with effectively—world problems which would exist even if the Soviet Union were to disappear tomorrow. Unnecessary barriers between nations, the ban on the movement of peoples, the restrictions on access to trade and raw materials, the disregard for the right of small nations to integrity and self-determination, the existence of cruel poverty in many parts of the world where want can be defeated—these problems would exist as barriers to the creation of a peaceful world if Karl Marx had never been born. Faced as we may soon be with a new kind of military stalemate and an uneasy balance of power, these are the tasks we must undertake. They would be our duty, even if the Soviet Union were not also trying to win over the uncommitted peoples of the world. The fact that the future balance of world power is also involved should only give our task an added sense of urgency.

NEXT WEEK

ARTHUR A. COHEN writes about Messianism and the modern Jew.

"One must remember that no environment, however well insulated or organized, can produce of itself a homogeneous religious community. Neither Judaism nor Christianity can assure itself that given effective education alone it can create believing Jews or Christians. There is much more that man demands. So with the Jew. Jewry was educated on the word of God, but the ghetto was an insufficient environment to insure a religious Jewry. When its walls were breached, the wind of modernity dispersed the odors of antiquity. The major problem that faced the liberated Jew was to secure acceptance and freedom. Democracy, liberalism, socialism therefore became the moving intellectual ideologies of Jewish emancipation, for it was these ideologies that had released the Jew from bondage."

STILL IN THE SADDLE

THE Juan Perón who has thus far succeeded in weathering last month's armed revolt is no longer as powerful as he was before the bombs started falling. Important contingents of the Argentine Navy are supposedly still unaccounted for and thereby may constitute a certain threat. The Perón labor federation is greatly discredited as a source of the dictator's strength in a critical hour; the Army is now able to make its influence more dominant. The regime appears headed for a more conservative course.

In all this the Church was involved but indidirectly. The expulsion of the two Buenos Aires prelates and Perón's excommunication were expected to produce widespread repercussions in a supposedly Catholic country. Hence it was at that very moment that the rebel Navy elements chose to strike. Likewise, when the Army generals took over, a number of priests and laymen who had been imprisoned during the persecution were released. In order now to mollify the Church and secure wider support for the revised government set-up, there is talk of negotiating a Concordat. If it ex-

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pects to gain by abuse of the Church, the Perón government will do so; if more can be achieved by utilizing the Church, it will take that course.

But whether the Army is to take a bigger hand in running things permanently or not, the Argentine prospect is a distinctly limited one. The great newspapers are destroyed, and a well-established freedom of the press with them. A fine court system and an outstanding judiciary have been heavily tampered with and gravely impaired. Interference has reduced the universities to shadows of their former selves—with many of the nation's leading scholars in exile.

It takes years to build up institutions such as these, a comparatively few months for an all-powerful dictatorship to destroy them. That is why there is little that is substantial to expect immediately from the ups and downs of Perón's fortunes. Even as strictly calculated tactics, a lessening of persecution and the preventing of disorder supply a welcome change. But the people and their institutions remain bereft of adequate guarantees. And when Perón himself has departed in favor of a regime dedicated to the common good, the Argentine nation will have to begin the construction of its constitutional edifice almost from the foundations.

SIMPLE-MINDED SLEUTHING

SOME months ago the Department of the Army published a pamphlet entitled "How to Spot a Communist." The pamphlet warned that "the approach to the problem of discovering Communists must be detached and completely free from prejudice," but claimed that "some of the clues mentioned in this study in connection with a factual approach provide the best system at present of spotting a Communist."

The "clues" offered by the Army for our guidance in saving the country included the use of such words as "book-burning," "colonialism," "reactionary," "materialist," and "exploitation." Also, we were given a list of "specific issues," the use of which we might regard as suspect. Among them were: "McCarthyism," "racial or religious discrimination," "immigration laws," "violation of civil rights," "any legislation concerning labor unions," and "Peace."

After many protests, this pamphlet has now been withdrawn. The question is: Why was it published in the first place?

The answer is that a truly appalling simple-mindedness has penetrated to high places in our government, and that too often a strong protest from important citizens must be made to restore some modicum of reason to important phases of our national life. "How to Spot a Communist" points up some of the serious ills that have beset too many Americans in recent years.

The "clues" this pamphlet offered, for example, were cited as suspect because, in each case, Communists had used them for their own ends. The reasoning was that if a person is concerned with things that Communists are (or pretend to be) concerned with, then that person is at least suspect of sympathy for Communism.

This, of course, is the most pernicious nonsense —and the "clues" offered in this pamphlet underline why. In each case the suspect word or issue has been employed by some of the most unsuspicious people in the country. If these "clues" had any validity at all, then a number of prominent citizens ranging from President Eisenhower to the Catholic Bishops of the United States would be under a Red cloud.

Now that the question of this approach to the problem of subversion has been dramatized by the stupidity of "How to Spot a Communist" we hope to see less of this kind of amateur Communist sleuthing among our friends on the far-right. If this should be the result, then the Army's pamphlet will have served a good cause after all.

CLOSE OF A CAREER

TWENTY-THREE years after his failure to stem the tide of the Great Depression and his rejection by the American electorate, Herbert Hoover has finally retired from public life. Of the many reasons evinced for his mistakes of a quarter-century ago, two would appear to be the most convincing: Mr. Hoover was an engineer who lacked the necessary political savvy that the American Presidency requires; he was incapable of dealing with the national emergency because of a doctrinaire and stubborn adherence to the outmoded doctrines of Adam Smith. Of the two the latter is the more important.

Yet Herbert Hoover stayed in public life quite undismayed by the nation's repudiation of his views. He remained high in Republican Party councils. He continued to expound his views in lectures, articles and books. For a while he adopted a more humorous turn of phrase but basically he stuck largely to his guns throughout the various Roosevelt terms, in peace and war. For the past eight years he has served his government as general chairman of the Hoover Commission, whose object, characteristically, was to eliminate waste and inefficiency in government. At the close

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of its activities the Commission points to a billion and a quarter savings in taxpayers' money—a sum which would have been much larger had it not been for the outbreak of the Korean war.

Mr. Hoover's years of dedication to the encouraging of private enterprise and to an accompanying government efficiency were public-spirited ones. No one, however opposed to the man's philosophy, can deny that Herbert Hoover is a thorough-going patriot. He has continued to spend himself for government economy and the other public virtues he believes in well into his eighty-second year.

Nor should we forget his many large-scale accomplishments for the welfare of humanity before the unfortunate coincidence of his rise to the Presidency when the United States economy was on the verge of a collapse. His exploits were substantial in World War I, when he made such an imposing record as head of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and as America's wartime Food Administrator. His interest in such constructive organizations as the Boys' Clubs of America is indicative of his broad concerns. His policies as Secretary of Commerce and as President should not blind his fellow citizens to the fact that Mr. Hoover's long public life embodied many substantial accomplishments.

A SPANISH DECISION

FREEDOM of worship is officially guaranteed in Spain, yet it is no secret that this freedom is seriously curtailed in practice by a number of restrictions placed on non-Catholics. Indeed, the situation of non-Catholics in Spain is frequently cited as evidence of Catholic duplicity in the matter of freedom of conscience.

A recent ruling by the Madrid Provincial Court of Appeals therefore has great importance as translating the promise of religious freedom into some measure of fact. This ruling affirmed the legal right of a baptized Catholic to contract a non-religious, civil marriage with a non-Catholic person. It agreed with the argument that although Catholicism is the State religion in Spain, baptized persons who wish to do so may legally enter into a civil marriage with a non-Catholic.

This seems to us to provide a strong hope that the position of the individual's civil rights may be improving in Spain. The point here, it must be remembered, is not one of *moral* right. Obviously, we do not believe that Catholics have a *moral* right to enter into a civil marriage. But the Spanish Court was ruling on a *legal* right, and that is quite a different thing.

The distinction of these two rights, the moral from the legal, lies at the heart of any approach to civil liberties. If the only rights granted to a man by the State are his *moral* rights, then very little freedom in any democratic sense will exist. But if a State learns to distinguish areas where it must leave a man legally free (even though he may still be morally bound) then the necessary beginning toward civil liberties has been made. It is historic news that a Spanish Court made such a distinction in June, 1955.

THE LAST MILE

DURING the past couple of months, starting with an excellent series of articles by Mr. Lewis Mumford in the *New Yorker*, and now continuing currently with feature articles in the New York *Times* and the *Herald Tribune* and other journals and periodicals, men concerned with the continued functioning of this civilization have seen fit, with increasing frequency, to come out in print with their worries over the effect of the automobile on the city, U.S.A., 1955. All is not well, one would gather, even if in the course of the daily round one did not have to venture out to see and smell the situation.

One Prophet of Doom, a city official, has gone so far as to suggest that the car could bring about the downfall of the civilization it has done so much to build. There is talk of banning private cars from "downtown" areas of cities, and in some cities citizens are having to fight to prevent their green parks from being converted to macadam parking lots. There is about all this more than a suggestion of the Frankenstein monster, as some have already noted.

We realize that the car is America's dreamboat on a personal level, and one of the most important factors in the nation's journey toward what it considers to be economic utopia, but it's proving hard to handle. Perhaps it all goes together, and you can't have everything; congestion in downtown Manhattan and the signing of the new contract in Detroit are connected. To suggest that the American boy shouldn't make the acquisition of a car or cars the goal of his young life, or, perhaps, that it isn't necessarily good that cars get longer and wider may sound like subversion. But, as Mr. Mumford has pointed out, there can be reached a saturation point for freewheeling. Some balance must be found before the cities are choked to death and the countryside becomes an interminable suburb, checkered with airports and slashed with super-throughways.

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The UN—Ten Years Later

THE QUESTIONS THAT CONFRONTED US THEN ARE BASICALLY STILL THE SAME

✠ ROBERT E. LUCEY

TEN years after the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations, the fundamental facts of international relations remain the same. We live in an interdependent world, a world society, however divided its peoples and governments. An interdependent world needs organization to live up to its interdependence, maintain peace everywhere, provide for the common defense, establish justice and promote its general welfare. The UN is its existing organization.

And since there have been no amendments to the Charter, the questions that still confront us are the same: Does the constitution, the Charter of the UN, need fundamental change? Or does it need only mild change? Or, in the state that the world is in, is it better to let the course of human events and judgments engineer certain changes—in the same way our Constitution has been changed by interpretation and practice—and then secure definite amendments later?

These questions, which assume an inadequate Charter, were asked ten years ago. The answer given then —"more time to consider"—is being given now. Such an answer, remembering the attitudes and practices of Russian Communism and imperialism, seems reasonable. But our own record is not good either.

Ten years ago the Administrative Board of the National Catholic Welfare Conference foretold the "recurrence of the isolationism of the abstentionist" as a result of giving five nations a veto in the Security Council and of making that Council so important. Our own country asked for and took the power of absolute veto which the Charter gives. We too are in part responsible for the isolationism that has grown and is still growing.

However good the UN is now, the aim of amending the Charter would be to make the UN an adequate organization for an objectively real world society to keep the peace and promote the general good. But entirely apart from their reaction to Russian intransigence, the American people do not now seem ready to join in amending the Charter of the UN. Perhaps if Russia had not reverted to Communist and imperialist type, our own experience would have been better, and we might now have been ready to take the lead or to follow in amending the UN Charter. But the variety and character of the defects in the organization, following the original mistake of the veto power, seem to indicate that they were not caused by Russia alone but are as well mistakes of our own. To entertain that idea seems like injustice to a government and a people that have in the last ten years done so much, publicly and privately, for the rest of the world. It also may seem as if no allowance is made for our traditional isolationism. Yet it is hard to make allowance for any isolationism at all after the hammering of the last forty years, and no American could be anything but proud of the good our country and people have done.

THE examples of our shortcomings are numerous enough. Not all of them appear to be examples of isolationism. Some seem samples, rather, of a kind of thinking that, while accepting academically the idea of an international society, still does not realize the importance of a world organization for the world community, then succumbs to petty cynicism or minor quibbling. This, of course, has the effect of undermining the whole idea of an adequate world organization and of weakening still further an already inadequate organization.

Some of our faults are examples of good things done only for what are declared to be cold war reasons. The Marshall Plan, foreign aid and Point Four, in the terms in which people often speak of them, are cases in point. Even some who theoretically hold that these are obligations of a rich nation towards poor nations are inclined to think of them only as cold war measures and to refer to them only or chiefly in those terms. To promote the economic well-being of other peoples in order to help them resist Communism from without and from within is good for those countries, for ourselves and for the world. But even if there were no cold war, the United States, rich in natural resources

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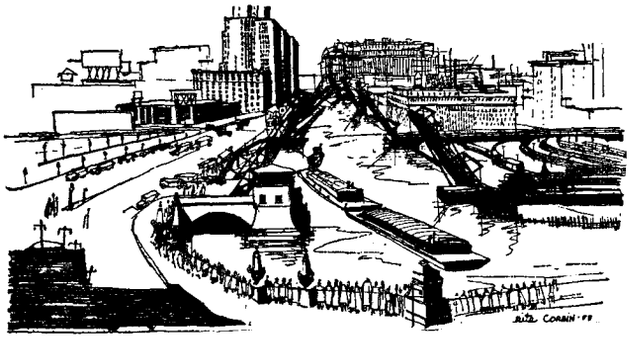
and economic ability, should help the nations that are poor in both, and we should do so as an act of human and Christian stewardship over great wealth in a poor world.

As time has gone on, particularly as regards Point Four and foreign aid in general, the trend has been to make resistance in the cold war the major criterion of help. In so doing the fundamental brotherhood of people in the world community has been neglected. In so doing, the notion of the world community, and the habits of thought that make it serve the common good, become blurred. This course offers no help to greater world unity and adequate world organization.

THEN there is the spectacle of U. S. representatives at the UN saying that they advocate nothing in the UN that does not directly help the United States. Such a statement can be interpreted benignly, if grotesquely, but it can also be interpreted—as it is—to mean that our country looks upon the UN, not as an organized agent of the common welfare of the world, but as something to be used only when the United States is directly helped. The latter meaning is ordinarily taken, and the idea of a world society, a world common good of which the national good is a part, and of a world organization adequate to secure it, is undermined. This is no preparation for amending the UN to give it adequate powers; it is an invitation to whittle its powers still further.

The proposed Bricker Amendment is aimed directly at reducing those powers, or at least the inevitably major function of our country in exercising those powers. Born of isolationist thinking, it tries to rely on



Congressional jealousy of the Executive department and on an appeal to states' rights. Under the Bricker Amendment, treaties—and therefore much of foreign policy—would not be a decision of the President and the Senate as now, but to an undetermined degree a matter also of the House of Representatives, and to another undetermined degree a matter of the President, the Senate, the House, the legislatures and governors of the forty-eight states and nearly all the courts. The aim of the Amendment clearly is to make United States cooperation in a world society difficult, in or apart from the UN, by throwing up legal barriers to the execution of every phase of foreign policy.

The bill providing for this restrictive measure once came close to passing the Senate. Now, so the commentators say, it is far from passing. Yet the backing it has already received has done great damage. The very danger that it might conceivably pass seems to have made the State Department hestitate to push treaties, for fear of furnishing arguments on behalf of the Bricker Amendment among those who might not like one treaty or another. Thus, even without passing, the Bricker Amendment has hurt our international position in the UN. Moreover, it has weakened the drive for and the explanation of measures that would make the UN less inadequate. Already it has cut three ways: it weakens the UN, it handicaps the effort to amend it into strength, and it weakens the position of the United States—the strongest non-Communist country—in a world struggling to build an organization that is necessary but is nonetheless still tortured with the growing pains of immaturity.

ANOTHER set of attitudes towards the UN centers around the criticism that the UN and its Declaration of Human Rights do not recognize God. Obviously the criticism points out a serious defect in the Charter. Above all else the nations need God. Yet a preamble could have been written dedicating the Charter to the one God or even the Triune God and still be the preface to a Charter even weaker than the one we have, or the preface to a Charter of the type that Pope Pius XII condemned in praising world federalism. For things are done in the name of God honestly and correctly, and honestly and incorrectly, and dishonestly and incorrectly; for example, Pius XI's Encyclical against the Nazis accused them of using the name of God "rhetorically."

The difficulty here is not in saying that the Charter should declare that the origin of both authority and human rights is ultimately God. The real difficulty lies in making so much of God's absence from the Charter as to give scandal to the weak who then go on to think that a Charter without God's name in it is of no use whatsoever. Such an attitude fails, of course, to take American history into account. For our own Constitution and Bill of Rights make no reference at all to God. And yet in His mercy He has helped us to become a great nation. We do some things well.

This defect in the UN documents is not the fault of Russia alone. Countries presumably Christian, presumably Catholic, sent representatives to the UN who would have none of God. In the strange world we live in—physically one, and yet mentally so distorted—it is probable that only Mohammedan countries would

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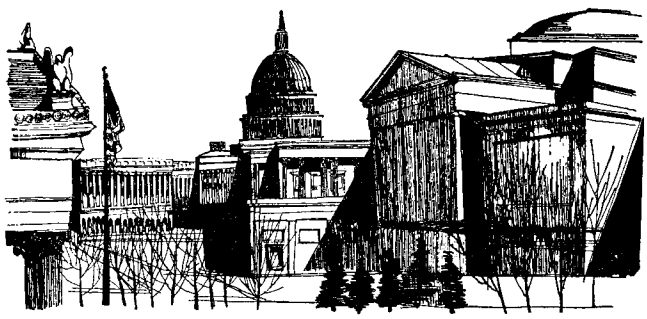
cast an all-but-solid vote for proclaiming God as the author of power and the source of rights. Surely, united nations that do not jointly recognize God as the source of their joint power offer no certain hope of keeping world peace and promoting world welfare. But that lack in the preamble of the Charter and in the UN Declaration of Rights, it should be remembered, is the fault of the governments and peoples who created the UN Charter and Declaration of Rights. As of now, there remains to us our own dedication under God to the UN and its good principles as steps towards something better, praying, also, for its present success —as we do dedicate ourselves to and pray for our own country and its Constitution, which is "godless"—and at the same time trying to amend both the UN Charter and our Constitution in this as well as other respects.

The fact that the UN's Declaration of Human Rights is good, and even better than our own Bill of Rights, often gets lost in the criticism that the UN's Declaration does not declare the divine origin of rights. The criticism leaves the presumption in people's minds that the UN Declaration is bad. Yet the Declaration actually states the inherent character of rights and thus puts them above the category of mere legal and government-given privileges—something which is not stated, although it is implicit, in our Constitution about our own rights. The UN Declaration proclaims, too, the prior right of parents to the education of their children; thus it states something true that our own Constitution does not say, even if our Supreme Court has discovered it there. And the UN Declaration includes social and economic rights far beyond anything found in our own Constitution.

In reality the UN's Declaration of Human Rights is a clear advance in the formulation of specific rights. Yet this fact gets lost in the criticism of "godlessness" even though the very same criticism is true of the less adequate United States Bill of Rights. All this adds, along with the drive for the Bricker Amendment and other proposals and criticisms looking to a diminished UN, to the unpreparedness of our people and our government to meet the need of so amending the UN Charter as to make it adequate. One should also note another important point. It should be obvious that enemies of social and economic rights here at home use for their own purpose the argument from the "godlessness" of the Charter and the Constitution.

The American isolationist is an animal of many stripes and strains. There is the American "Firster-Laster-All-the-Timer." Usually he wants the United States to secede from the world community. A good many of this type, if scratched a little, are found to be imperialists, and some of our most influential isolationists either were themselves once imperialists or are imperialism's natural offspring. They are the most dangerous type because of their eminent economic and political position. They seem to think that our country does not belong to the family of nations; that our people do not belong to the human race.

Today, however, exaggerated patriotism, and an overwhelming suspicion of all other countries or of one particular country, seem to produce more isolationists than imperialism does. It is not long since very many of our citizens, perhaps even the majority, thought that it was not only possible but good for the United States to go it pretty much alone. We swam



in the stream of exaggerated nationalism for a long time. Now it is hard for us to swim out of it.

The most obvious source of isolationism is cynicism. In human affairs today, there is, of course, much evidence of the fact of original sin. A realistic approach to all human institutions, and to the human part of all institutions is necessary. But some distort this necessity to the point of saying that all, and particularly all governments, are vile and corrupt beyond our imagining. They push their imagination to the utmost, and at last almost nothing seems good to them or capable of being good. At times this attitude may be a mere excuse for inactivity, but it is used as a justification for offhand judgments or whims and for unintentional propaganda on behalf of American secession from, or halfhearted allegiance to, the world community and its organization.

CATHOLIC organizations are subject to all these different winds of doctrine. Sometimes they are swayed by influences outside the organization and sometimes by Catholics, who, honestly or for selfish reasons, do not carry into their social thinking and practice the doctrine of the Communion of Saints or of the Mystical Body, or the fundamental truth of the dignity and brotherhood of all men that is basic to the Faith.

Sometimes the search for perfection blinds us to the fact that a gradual growth towards perfection in political and economic relations without ever reaching it is probably—one may say, certainly—all that is possible. The Genocide Convention, for example, makes it an international crime to destroy a people's national, racial, religious or ethnic character and cul-

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ture. Why any American should oppose it or why any Catholic anywhere should condemn it is a profound mystery, except that the Genocide Convention might be considered not perfect. Yet why expect perfection in the first place? Why be moved by an argument that something only ninety per cent good, or only seventy-five per cent, is therefore unacceptable? If it is laudable to seek the best, it is also praiseworthy to accept and work for the good, if that is all that can be reached.

The Genocide Convention applies to acts destructive of national, racial, religious and ethnic groups. It does not include political groups as some have desired. If a political group were destroyed for reasons of destruction of a people, that, too, it seems, would be a crime. Yet even if political groups as such are not protected, surely it is still good to make destruction of a people's national, racial, religious or ethnic character an international crime.

In the case of the Declaration of Human Rights, some have spoken against it for fear it would indict our own treatment of Negroes. Some have spoken against the Genocide Convention for the same reason. If we deserve such indictment, we should, indeed, be hailed before a Court. The period of history when the sin of segregation could be tolerated to avoid greater evils has passed.

There are still others who make the International Labor Organization and the Declaration of Human Rights their chief enemy. Why? Because both include provisions on economic and social rights whose legal protection or even existence they oppose.

Perhaps the most discouraging thing of all is to hear it said that this or that very reasonable proposal is an invasion of sovereignty. Sovereignty is a fine and well-rounded word, but, standing alone, it smacks of the absolutist nation, inheriting the powers of absolutist kings. Yet neither nation nor king is ever rightfully absolute in powers. It is of the very nature of a world society, whether organized or not, that no nation is absolute in its powers either toward its own people or toward other peoples. Indeed, even when the world society was not yet a fact but only a longing, the sovereignty of a nation and its government was a limited one. Caesar, whether a world organization or a nation, is a Caesar with limited rights.

WHEN one considers this record of shortcomings (it could be amplified) in regard to the world organization, it appears that as a government and a people we still lag. This is true even if one puts this record alongside all the good we have done or helped to do—our great private relief programs, the Truman Plan to hold back Communism, the Marshall Plan, NATO, the Western European Union, SEATO, Point Four, the strengthening of the Pan American Union (the Organization of American States), leadership against the North Korean aggression, leadership in strengthening the UN Assembly, the formation of federations of anti-Communist labor unions, and the like. At one moment we act in the spirit of a world community. At another we behave as if we were ourselves supreme and untouchable. At one time we act as if the world's structure needs re-fashioning to fit the world's needs. At another we talk, and sometimes act, as if we still lived in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps one basic trouble is that some of us know that the United States is part of a world community and resent it, and others know it and welcome it, and still others, while favoring the UN, are vague and waver. Besides, those who welcome the world community inevitably differ over how it should best be organized; those who resent a community of the world have merely to block and oppose and ridicule and play upon inveterate prejudices. In any case, whatever the cause, in the last ten years we have not yet made up our minds about amendments that will make the UN more adequate as an organization.

IN a time of cold war it is hard to make distinctions between what is necessary as a part of the cold war and what would be necessary even if the cold war did not exist. But it appears that those who favor a stronger UN have let the fact of the cold war overwhelm them. They have not stressed enough the steps towards fuller world unity and the reasons for those steps. Even the cold war can be used to prepare for a better UN—if we realize what it means to be part of a world community which must be committed, by its very nature, to world peace and to world welfare, and which requires an adequate organization to attain the purposes that flow from its existence. Today the true isolationists are, I think, few. The rest of us, distracted by Communism and the cold war, by thoughts of bombs and political rivalries, by traditional notions and emotions, have often let the isolationists seize the ball. And they run with it always towards the wrong goal.

Ten years ago this coming November, the Administrative Board of the NCWC pointed out defects in the new Charter that made it weak and inadequate but praised our government for entering the organization. At that time the Bishops looked forward to changes that would come "from the recognition of the rights and duties of international society." Ten years later we seem to be in the same position, and it is not Russia's fault alone that we still do not in adequate numbers realize the actual existence of an international society and its rights and its duties. The fault is largely our own.

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Soviet Man Today

ERIK VON KUEHNELT-LEDDIHN

ONLY a great nation can fall very deep, and the Soviet Union, Russia's distorting mirror, reminds me of the pedagogical atmosphere of an English nursery to which, as a child, I was periodically subjected. I still remember the constant exhortations to be obedient, to shun all things which "weren't nice," to be kind to animals and to all other children, to practice the cold virtue of self-control, never, never to be selfish, and to act according to the sacred tenet that cleanliness is next to godliness.

Even then, though merely a child, I rightly suspected that no transcendental values were involved in these completely utilitarian precepts, which were so deceptively "Christian" at a superficial glance. And this is precisely what we find today in the Soviet Union: officially it has become a big agnostic nursery, thoroughly Victorian in the worst sense of the term, with a press, a literature, a cultural policy and a governmental machine enunciating nothing but praise or condemnation, painting the whole universe in black and white, acting as a Behemoth who punishes the wicked with brutal fines, prison and death, and rewards the virtuous by distributing special prizes of all sorts—cash, jobs, promotions, titles, medals and citations.

All this breeds a general hypocrisy, a nausea for everything emanating from the omnipotent State and a boredom which in its earlier manifestations was clearly recognized by the Merezhkovskis in their prophetic book, *The Reign of the Antichrist,* (Munich, 1919), which is still unavailable in English: "If you walk through the streets of St. Petersburg and observe the expressions of those passing by, then you can guess immediately: this man is a Communist. It is not murderous satiety, not bestial callousness which you find in these faces, but boredom, the transcendental boredom of the 'Paradise on Earth,' of the Kingdom of Antichrist."

YET all this is only one aspect, the official aspect, of Soviet life superimposed on the Russian character, mind and temperament, which are almost diametrically opposed to the spirit of the government. The notions that every nation has "the government it deserves" or that governments "are the mirror of a nation's soul" completely overlook the dialectics of a nation's psychological structure and the permanent presence of foreign influences.

An excessive amount of nonsense has been said about the "perennially anti-individualistic" character of the Russian, who in the *mir* and the *artel* had forms of collective enterprise long before the *kolkhoz* and state capitalism came into existence. This theory of the "natural communism" of the Russians, which is so soothing to us because it absolves us so neatly of the guilt of moral indifference, has been exploded by the British writer, Edward Crankshaw. In *International Affairs* for October, 1946, he described with great insight the powerful anarchical drives of the individual Russian, rightly insisting that he loathes all government from the bottom of his soul. On the other hand, Crankshaw declares that the Russian has an unshakable hankering for absolutes; detesting compromise, he is therefore automatically subject not only to "orthodoxies" but also to "rule-from-above"—since self-government under these circumstances is almost impossible.

The Russians, Crankshaw insists, are "completely experimental and free." They are "a naturally fluid people who have to forge hoops of iron round themselves or disintegrate utterly." And it all comes from a natural individualism which makes our own vaunted rugged individualism look like the abandonment of personality. "What else could we expect from a nation which produced not Jeremy Bentham nor Emerson nor Kant but Dostoevski, Soloviev, Herzen and Bakunin?"

No wonder, therefore, that dark and terrible things are happening behind the nursery façade. This is partly the result of the enormous antithesis between the masters of the Kremlin and the Russian people. These masters are more sinister than anything Old Muscovy or Byzantium ever produced because they lack a living Christian background, while the Russian people, because they are artistically highly gifted, have always showed a slight tendency toward a schizophrenic or double life.

Of course "double existence" today is not a specifically Russian phenomenon; it occurs in all totali-

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tarian dictatorships. In the USSR this dualism has been nurtured by the strong survival of the family, which has received effective government support for some time—for utilitarian rather than idealistic or ethical reasons. Yet the moral decline in Communist circles in Russia is terrifying; a puritanical revolutionary fervor never lasts for long. The enforced aping of a Christian way of life without Christian convictions is intolerable, far more so than a frank, pagan hedonism. The corruption or perversion of the best is always worst.

THE Russian Orthodox Church has been mortgaged by a far-reaching collaboration with the government. One of the most significant concessions to the Eastern Church in recent months are the permissions granted to the seminary of Moscow to confer the title of doctor on its graduates and to use the title professor for its teachers. Such blemishes do not have quite the same effect on the Russians as they would on us. The Church of Russia is traditionally a "humble church," a suffering and crucified Church, quite unlike the "arrogant Church of Rome."

Neither erudition, leadership, nor great personal sanctity is expected of the Russian priest, who has always served as a butt for jokes. This explains the surprise of the Communist authorities on finding that in the "liberated areas" of Eastern Poland, Lithuania and Latvia the Catholic clergy and laity put up an organizational and intellectual resistance totally different from anything the atheist propagandists had ever encountered before.

As a result of official pressures, religion has become a family affair. One of my informants, recently returned from Russia, told me about children who behave in the streets, in school and in the *Komsomol* in one way, but in an entirely different way in their own homes—where they show great filial respect for their parents and say prayers before and after meals. The pressure on high officials is quite severe, but I know of bureaucrats who have had their wedding rings blessed and of *Komsomol* leaders who were married in church (the subject of a *Krokodil* cartoon). Last year the Holy Well in Glinkovo near Moscow attracted large crowds; *Trud* published a list of high civil servants, university professors and scientists who came in luxury cars to use the miraculous waters. A university professor recently refused to hold an atheistic public lecture on the grounds that it was against his conscience.

Soviet atheistic propaganda, by and large, is directed against the weakest spots in Russian popular religiosity, belief in [spurious] miracles and superstitions which often go back to older pagan beliefs and practices. It cannot successfully attack the theistic position on cogent philosophic or scientific grounds. The *Teachers' Journal* of July 31, 1954, bemoans the fact that high school students, while learning by heart all the beauties of Darwinism, have fallen under the evil influence of believers; they now misuse their newly acquired knowledge to prove "the existence of an Almighty God Who has created the universe."

In order to understand the nature of official atheist propaganda, one must read the letter of I. Kolchinski of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. It was featured in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and calls for mass production of telescopes and celestial globes as "powerful instruments in the struggle against religious prejudices and superstitions" and as "visual aids for atheistic propaganda." The trouble atheistic propaganda has with Catholics in White Ruthenia can therefore well be imagined, for the inhabitants there have a tradition of arguing their religion more rationally than the Russians do. It was remarked in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that teachers of the Polish minority took whole courses in apologetics.

Perhaps the most salient characteristic of the Soviet Union to strike the outside observer is its rigid class system, which is unique today in Christendom. The educational laws of October, 1940, have made it so difficult for children of the lower classes to rise in the social scale that it might be justifiable to talk of a caste system there. Since most members of the new upper classes have actually risen in the social scale and those members taken over from the old order are happy that they were not thrust down to proletarian levels, a certain loyalty to the government actually exists in the higher bureaucratic ranks. It is also found in the army, the various forms of police and—what is most important—in the new materialistic, half-educated and hedonistic petty bourgeoisie, who number from ten to fifteen million people.

This is a process recalling the social upheaval caused by the French Revolution; yet in this, as in all other respects, we should remember that the "heart-beat," the rhythm of Russia and the Russian Revolution is infinitely slower than that of France. In a sense we

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now behold the *Directoire* of the Russian Revolution, with the shadow of a new Robespierre and a Napoleon still far off.

THE Russian, of all Europeans, is the least likely to turn into a machine—and, with the Spaniard, the least likely to allow himself to be deprived of his soul without a struggle. This explains the magnitude of the suppression, the totality of the control, the hysterical intensity of the re-education of a people who proverbially resist every rule. Hence also the truly paralyzing terror of a government riding a tiger.

The reaction against this pressure from above is not (and cannot be) a unified and coordinated action but rather a search for "outlets," a craving for individual action. The *partisan* movement in World War II testifies to the Russian masses' disgust with the routine of Soviet life; at long last here was an opportunity to fight, to lead a completely dissolute and savage life, to show initiative, to rob, to pillage, to rape, to take lives or to die. Many of the successful *partisan* leaders were quietly executed once the war was won; they were of a human type that could not be trusted in a nursery.

The scorched earth policy was a welcome orgy of destruction of a hated state property which belonged to no one. The frightful behavior of the Red Army in "liberated," no less than in conquered, areas must be understood from the same angle—the delirium of freedom and irresponsibility. To be sure, the discipline of the Russian armies which marched through Western Europe during the Napoleonic wars was hardly exemplary (Goerres protested violently against their behavior) but there is no comparison between the events of 1814 and those of 1945; there has been a fantastic increase in literacy, atheism and a spirit of revolt against the world in which the Russians have to live.

The war was a unique opportunity to lead a colorful life, to rebel against the deadening symmetry of a planned and basically inhuman existence. The same human motives account for the frightening incidence of crime and such criminal organizations as "Black Cat" and "The Strong Ones." Crime, of course, cannot be dealt with in the Soviet newspapers since that would be a blot on the Paradise on Earth, which should have overcome such survivals of a capitalist society. Crime, needless to say, cannot be mentioned in accounts which are to be read in a nursery; the children might get ideas. But the big crime syndicates do exist. The only official admission of their functioning is a special medal given to those who have successfully fought against "banditism."

The Soviet way of dealing with crime is to preach morals in a civic sense on the one hand and to deal out draconic punishment on the other. The object of the latter is not so much to reform the culprit as to transfer him to "working areas" or concentration camps. Crime thus becomes a valuable asset to the State, whose police agencies are constantly on the lookout for new cheap labor. Reliable estimates give a total of twenty million men and women in these "work districts" and forced labor compounds.

The death of Stalin and the execution of Beria gave hope to these victims, a hope which was not fulfilled—although after Beria's fall the treatment of prisoners changed slightly in that the MVD then became markedly friendlier and less sure of themselves. But the disappointment of these hopes aroused the courage of despair, and despair bred large-scale rebellions. Not only in Vorkuta but also in the work camps along the Volga-Don-Canal real risings did take place involving serious fighting and considerable losses on the part of MVD regiments.

IT IS with awe and sadness that we must regard this drama of a great and extremely gifted nation held subject to a caricature of Christian ethics in a godless nursery. What we witness from outside is, nevertheless, not one, but several, interconnected tragedies: the parody of Christianity, with morals enforced in a mechanical and soulless way; the artificial keeping of men on the level of children; the repression of so much that is fundamentally human; the spectacle of a rampant new Jansenism and Puritanism, and over the whole scene the cold light of the vice St. Thomas calls the "sin of insensibility."

Soviet newspapers and periodicals, including the satirical *Krokodil,* are chock full of accounts of the rise of a new cynical, brutal, pleasure-loving youth of zoot-suiters, of *stilyagas,* who laugh at the ethics of their parents—ethics often fine in themselves but without solid foundations. This is the drama of an atheistic humanism.

Politically there are no *immediate* alternatives or solutions, since public opinion cannot crystallize in a totalitarian state—as nothing can crystallize in a piece of concrete. The ruling ideology is a form of positivism incarnated in an inquisitorial State-Counter-Church. It is unable to give an answer to the wherefrom or the whereto, neither to its power-mad hierarchs, nor to its awards in this murderous kindergarten.

Here we have a drama which should move us to the depths of our souls and send us to our knees in prayer. These people need our sympathy . . . and sympathy means, literally, to be united in suffering. The moment we forget that the Russians are human beings we have morally lost the struggle against Communism. And not only morally.

(*This is the second of two articles on literature and culture in the Soviet Union today.*)

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NO, NO, A THOUSAND TIMES NO

SOMEONE said half-seriously that the general findings of Professor Stouffer's elaborate survey of *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties* indicate that the members of the Communist Party are just about the most tolerant citizens in the U.S. Actually, of course, the Communists are among the least tolerant, straitjacketed as they are by political dogma. The underlying suppositions of the Stouffer poll, though, seem to imply that the nation's tolerance is measured by popular forbearance with leftist partisans and their ideas.

Surely, this kind of tolerance provides a temperature-reading, especially at a time when the entire left is under a cloud. But I would have been a more satisfied customer if Professor Stouffer had placed more emphasis on the tolerance meted out to right-wingers and their opinions. For it is becoming ever more clear that non-conformity is found on the right as well as the left.

We hear much about conformity on the campus nowadays. Every now and then a case breaks into the newspapers, as when a leftist speaker, or someone on the drop-dead lists maintained by the guardians of civic virtue, is banned from the podium. In most cases I am happy to join the picket-lines organized to protest the ban. But what about the right-wingers who never get invited in the first place? I don't think you can judge the health of American universities merely by finding out if Owen Lattimore would be permitted to speak on campus. Joe McCarthy's acceptability ought to be tested, too.

Tolerance is a two-way street, and the virtuous do not all walk down its left side. It is no great measure of a liberal's tolerance to ask him to endorse another liberal's rights. But something might be proved if the reception George Sokolsky would get at Sarah Lawrence were pitted against the reception Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., would get at Holy Cross.

The idea seems to be abroad that non-conformity is an exclusively left-wing phenomenon. If anything, I think there is more resistance to conformity on the right. Who, for instance, was in rebellion at Yale, William F. Buckley, Jr., or the alumni who found his book impious? Who, during the war, was conforming, the editorial-writers who went along with the *Mission to Moscow* portrait of Russia, or the Brooklyn *Tablet,* which kept insisting that Stalin was a tyrant? Whom did the MP's have to carry out of his office, Sewell Avery or Walter Reuther? Today, President Eisenhower is fabulously popular. Who conforms more readily to this political fact of life, the liberal Democrats or the Neanderthal Republicans?

Two weeks ago Frederick D. Wilhelmsen wrote an article in this magazine called "The Conservative Vision." It was just about the most non-conforming piece The Commonweal has published in years. In it the author asked liberals to "cease sneering at conservatism for its failure to come to grips with the concrete issues of the day: we conservatives do not hold the power; if we did, the world would dance to a different tune." Again, "liberalism must cease its weary preaching: it does no good to advise those of us who, in spirit, are of the body of tradition to exorcise our illusions and face the modern world. We face the modern world every day and we have lived our whole lives in it: it confirms us the more in the vision which is ours." I take it that Mr. Wilhelmsen was resisting the liberal demand that he and his fellow conservatives conform.

During the war those non-conformists, the nation's pacifists and conscientious objectors, were banished to detention camps. They included some anarchists and socialists but a larger percentage of Coughlinites and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Conformity and non-conformity all depend on what one is conforming to, and where. As an anti-McCarthyite during the great controversy, there were certain circles where I might have been treated as a political leper, because I did not conform to the image set down of what a Catholic editor should think about McCarthy. But in other circles my opinions about McCarthy and McCarthyism were crumbly clichés. Had I been a McCarthyite, I would have thought twice before venturing an opinion at certain cocktail parties—cocktail parties to which I certainly would not have been invited.

A student at a well-known liberal college told me recently that the handful of Republican students there had difficulty in getting a faculty member to serve as a GOP club advisor. There was a Republican on the faculty, it turned out, but he was not anxious to make the fact so public.

The forefathers of the Daughters of the American Revolution were surely non-conformists in their day, as liberal columnists love to point out. But the latterday dames are, too. They are forever being lectured on keeping up with the times and conforming to the progress made since the Revolution.

Colonel McCormick was a non-conformist. So were Father Coughlin, Gerald L. K. Smith, Henry Ford, J. P. ("The public be damned!") Morgan, and the leaders of the Christian Front. Today, Vivian Kellems, the lady who resolutely refuses to pay income tax, and Senator Knowland, the gentleman who has clung stubbornly to his position on the Orient, are non-conformists. Practically the entire Pantheon of *American Mercury* heroes would have to be classified as non-conformists. In the Senate the Junior Senator from Wisconsin is the greatest non-conformist of them all. Who, after all, feels the greatest need for a third party these days?

JOHN COGLEY.

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FROM THE BELGIAN CONGO

Colonialism, Belgian Style

MOST of the Belgian Congo is a vast crater. Once it was filled with a sea, but the sea spilled out the crack which is the Congo River and all that remains of this ancient lake is the great river and the humid bottomland which follows it down to the Atlantic. Ships come to the Belgian Congo up the river to the port of Matadi. There they are unloaded and the freight transferred to a railroad which runs through the bitter heat to Léopoldville, a dusty, rapidly expanding industrial town which is the capital city of this colony. The river is the border between the restless Congo, scarred with open-cut mines where some of the greatest mineral wealth of the world is being blasted out of the earth, expanding and prosperous and not altogether secure, and, on the other side, the slower life of French Equatorial Africa.

The Congo is low and humid in the southwest; high, cool, magnificent in the east. Coquilhatville, in the west, is a green town in the equatorial forest. It is on the exact spot where the equator and the Congo River cross each other. The King of the Belgians, Baudouin, visited there one Sunday in May. A program of native dances was held in his honor which must have given to the young king a sense of the violence of the Congo, of the Congo which existed a few years ago and which today still stirs below the surface of the civilization which the Belgians have brought here. Of the five dances, three were concerned with mutilation or killing. One, a retelling of woman's daily routine, was performed by red-powdered women to a rhythm of two drums, a gong and a bamboo bow (an astonishingly intricate rhythm, like all the native rhythms I have heard here; if you listen closely you hear a subtlety and orchestration almost symphonic in its development; it is a thick rhythm with fibers of half-beats and almost imperceptible alterations of tone). The red-stained women seemed entranced by the rhythm, and the climax of their dance came when one whirled into the center of the circle where a goat was tied in a snare and sliced the neck through; the snare flipped the head high in the air, blood spurted. It was a reminiscence, the program stated, of human sacrifice.

The next day in Luluabourg, in the central Congo, the tribal chiefs of the area were presented to King Baudouin at a garden party at the Provincial Governor's residence. One of the chiefs was king of the Bakuba people, a tribe which dominates the Luluabourg area (and until the time of the first world war had successfully resisted even the whites). He was arrayed in a beaded garment stiff as armor. He was wholly encased in it, grotesque and beautiful. An obese old man, he sat stiffly with a red flower in his mouth. Dressed as he was, he did not look like an African king, he looked like an Egyptian potentate. Next to him, sword in hand, half facing him, stood an impassive guard. (Another warrior hung off by the bushes, pulling on a cigarette.) The native king had traveled for several days to see Baudouin. He is so old and fat that when he is dressed in state he must be carried by his warriors and has to be lifted in and out of the back of a truck. As he was carried up the garden path to meet King Baudouin he seemed like the Red Queen in Tenniel's drawings. He said once, "I have hunger and thirst from traveling to see this king."

The King of the Bakuba has seven hundred wives, according to one story, only forty or so according to another. They are, in a sense, hostages from his people. A Presbyterian missionary in Luluabourg photographed his coronation in 1939 where he was seated in state on two slaves. When his predecessor died that year, a government agent was present to make sure that two or three wives were not buried with the old king to comfort him on his journey. Masks were buried in their place, but the missionary says that a native privately reported that the favorite wives had nonetheless died, killed discreetly in the bush.

Belgian policy here is to prevent, as far as it is possible, gross violations of civilized behavior—ritual murder, slavery, etc. But the Belgians do not interfere any more than necessary with tribal organization and custom, preferring to try to bring about a gradual evolution rather than an abrupt destruction of existing social organization. They govern in the bush by means of tribal kings. When this king dies, his successor will probably be a young man who has been given special education in political science and social affairs. So there still is something of power in the King of the Bakuba; but there also is something rather sad, something of sad tales of the death of kings, in the sight of this king, near the end of a dynasty, sitting in the governor's garden in bronze age magnificence, blinking at the white photographers.

THE Europeans who make their homes in this country are young and vigorous. All the girls seem in their twenties and all have young children hanging on them. Elisabethville, the mining center

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in the East, is the only place where I have seen many old people. It is a settled town, with a pair of hotels which are oases of chic and formality in a dusty land. The Grand Hôtel Léopoldville II even has a cocktail pianist in dinner jacket.

Seventy-five miles from Elisabethville is Shinkolobwe, where about half of the free world's uranium is produced. Between seventy and eighty per cent of the world's cobalt, over seventy per cent of its industrial diamonds, eight per cent of its copper and substantial percentages of other minerals—tin, cadmium, zinc—come from the Belgian Congo. By far the biggest mining enterprise in the Congo, and one of the biggest in the world, is a fascinating complex of public and private interests, colonialism, paternalism, authoritarianism and enlightened social practice, called Union Minière du Haut-Katanga.

The Haut-Katanga is the temperate southern part of the Katanga region in the southeastern Congo where the earliest Belgian explorations in 1891 found evidence of mineral wealth. At that time the Congo was an independent state which had as its sovereign Léopold II of Belgium. Henry Morton Stanley, the New York *Herald* reporter who found the Congo while looking for Dr. Livingstone, had been unable to interest either the British or Belgium in colonizing the place. Léopold was interested, however, and with his private fortune he established the Congo Free State as his private property. Under his rule, the colonial exploitation became something of a world scandal, and in 1908 he made the title over to Belgium.

Before this odd transaction, the Free State had granted concessions to a company which had been formed to explore the Katanga. In 1900 the state and this company had jointly created a new organization

in which they vested their commercial rights. This company in turn handed over property rights to an Anglo-Belgian concern called Tanganyika Concessions, and it, in 1906, joined with an enormous Belgian financial house, the Société Générale de Belgique, to set up Union Minière.

Union Minière's controlling shareholder is a company which is two-thirds owned by the government of the Belgian Congo. The Government of Belgium also owns part of the Société Générale, which holds a fifth of the Union Minière stock. Union Minière is not unique in its interrelationship with the government. Otraco, the Congo river transportation system, is government controlled; Sabena, the Belgian national airline which provides the colony's vital internal air network, is in part a government operation. There is no major primary industry in the Belgian Congo which does not have a link with the government.

Union Minière made 62.5 million dollars in 1953 after taxes. For every 2.28 francs it paid in dividends, it paid 2.27 francs in taxes. It has eleven principal subsidiary companies ranging from flour mills to an explosives plant. The enormous private corporation, controlled by the Government of the Congo, produces all of the Congo's uranium, seventy-five per cent of the world's cobalt and eight per cent of the world's copper. It is quite an operation.

Union Minière houses its twenty thousand native employees in company villages. It educates them in night schools, educates their children, supervises their health, provides nurses and doctors for them, hospitals for them, teachers and social workers; provides swimming pools, stadia, football teams and bands; it encourages them to marry, or, if they are married, to establish their families within the company communities. It pays its workers largely in these social benefits. As workers give evidence of the ability to manage a budget, the company substitutes cash for rations and will assist older workers to buy homes.

One of the largest of the Congo's independent mining operations, Geomines at Manono, two hundred and fifty miles north of Elisabethville, is an example of this government-supervised labor policy at work. There the company community is in the center of an arid region of scrubby bush. Geomines has several open-cut copper mines at work and has built around them an independent community which is all company: there is a European center and there are native villages; there are shops where Geomines manufactures its own iron, forges its own machinery parts and repairs its equipment.

The native community is made up of rows of identical houses, small, not very satisfactory by Western standards, but an undeniable improvement in protection, sanitation and privacy over the mud and grass huts of the tribes. The amount of floor-space per person and the sanitary conditions are government-established, and a government inspector makes sure that the regulations are observed. There is a large native social center and a modern native hospital.

At the schools the boys are taught to read and write and do simple calculations. They may attend trade schools after the elementary education, or they may go to state or mission schools for more advanced academic training. The number of those who will receive the equivalent of an American high-school

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education is minute, but all will become literate in their own language, will learn some French, and will have the chance to get basic technical training. If for no reason other than self-interest, the company wants its employees to advance as far as possible in education; part of its policy is to encourage the employee to obtain the legal status of *immatriculé,* a declaration by the courts that a native has Westernized himself, given up tribal customs and tribal law, and is the legal equal of a Belgian.

The native girls go to homemaking schools where they are taught washing, sewing, cooking and sanitation. The villages are administered by the company, which provides the municipal services. They are policed by men assigned from the regional police force, working in cooperation with Geomines. There are no trade unions at Geomines, and there are no workmen's associations or committees of any kind among the native workers.

This kind of company community is probably unique in the modern world. It is more of a self-contained company town than nineteenth-century New England ever knew. It is partially a creation of the special conditions of the Congo, the primitive culture of the labor force and the inaccessibility of the region; it is governed by decent social policies under the strict supervision of the government. It is benevolent paternalism—nothing more, and nothing less. And it is the industrial pattern of the Belgian Congo.

THE economy of the Belgian Congo rests on the extractive industry. Although there are research stations making experiments which offer the possibility of farming land now arid and yellow successfully, there is no large scale agriculture. Even in the beautiful Kivu highlands of the east and the UN trust territory of Ruanda-Urundi, where the climate is almost perfect and the land rich, farming is not a big business. Most of the food consumed by Europeans is imported from Belgium. (The colonists seem too to be unwilling to experiment with diet; Belgians here eat the same heavy foods and European fruits they eat in Belgium.) The Watutsi people, seven feet tall with the carriage and dress of Roman senators, protect their sacred cattle on the splendid hills of the Ruanda, while the president of the local chamber of commerce remarks that he cannot see how the simple economy can be changed to improve the Ruanda-Urundi's external trade balance.

There are great timber resources in the equatorial forests, but the timber is almost impossible to get at or to transport out of the Congo. There are some big plans for developing the non-mineral potential of this colony but they are a long way from realization. In the Congo River between Léopoldville and Matadi, for example, there are rapids which offer an ideal site for a hydroelectric system—the Inga installation—which would be the largest thing of its kind in the world. The present colonial administration is extremely interested in building this plant, but it cannot be done piecemeal. If it is done it will provide more power than Grand Coulee in the United States; it will produce 168 billion kilowatt hours of electricity

a year, one-fifth of the present power consumption of the United States. And it would be the cheapest power in the world. But what is to be done with the power?

To build Inga and make use of its power (to process West African aluminum ore is one scheme), foreign capital and foreign companies must enter the Congo. The Belgians would like it to be European capital. But Britain has its own interests in Africa. France has the vast and relatively underdeveloped area of French Equatorial Africa as well as North Africa. The United States is an obvious place to look for capital, but not only is there the problem of attracting it to a colony, there is a question of whether the Belgians want the Americans in the Congo. A good many Belgian colonials suggest that American anti-colonialism is nothing more than a scheme to substitute American for Belgian economic domination of the Congo. The Minister of Colonies recently said rather pointedly that Belgium "intends to preserve its established financial, economic and political positions in the event of possible future increases of foreign investments in the Belgian Congo."

Belgium, a tiny state with a rich colony, has a very firm grip on the Congo. It is determined that its style of colonialism is going to work, and that neither the need for capital, nor American and UN anti-colonialism, nor even the self-interest of the Belgian land-owners in the Congo itself, is going to upset their position here. They have soberly observed the colonial troubles of their French, Dutch and British neighbors, and are convinced that they can succeed where others are failing.

WILLIAM PFAFF.

(This is the first of two articles on the Belgian Congo. The second will appear shortly.)

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THE SCREEN

JUST FOR THE FUN OF IT

IT is a pleasure to report that Walt Disney and his cohorts have come up with a new feature-length animated cartoon that should please all men, women and dogs. The only dissenters will be cats and misanthropes—the former because the picture shows a couple of mean, slinky Siamese cats with their true, nasty dispositions, and the latter because the whole film is bathed in a luminous glow of almost everything being right in 1910. Well, for the two dogs who play the title roles in "Lady and the Tramp" everything is almost right in those halcyon days, especially for Lady who lives with Jim Dear and Darling, a couple of newlyweds very much in love with each other and with their cocker spaniel puppy. Next year, however, Lady loses her exalted position when there's a baby in the house; and Tramp, a foot-loose and collar-free mongrel from the wrong side of the tracks (who comes as close to being a Chaplin-like character as is possible for a cartoon dog) tries to talk Lady into running away from Snob Hill where there's a fence around every tree and a lid on every garbage can. But Lady prefers being a house dog—until Jim Dear and Darling go on a vacation, and the aunt who takes care of the baby brings in her Siamese cats, a couple of hellions who drive Lady into roaming with Tramp.

Perhaps "Lady and the Tramp" is the best full-length cartoon Disney has made in a long, long time (and maybe the best he ever made) because he wasn't constrained by any set patterns as with "Alice," "Peter Pan" and the other standard plots. He and his staff worked with Ward Greene who wrote the story; and they all had fun with the postal-card 1910 backgrounds in CinemaScope and Technicolor and with the romantically winsome story that Barrie himself would have approved of. Actually "Lady and the Tramp" doesn't pretend to be a dog's eye view of man, but it is a very clever and amusing man's eye view of a dog's eye view of man.

ALTHOUGH Homer alone (this is doubted by some) wrote the *Odyssey*, it took six scriptwriters to whip up the movie version which was handsomely filmed in Technicolor in Italy. Homer's version reads better, but of course Producers Dino De Laurentiis and Carlo Ponti had an awfully long story to contend with. They chose to drop the gods, who, as you know, play rather important roles in the original: so the total effect now is something like a soap opera showing wife Penelope weaving away like mad to ward off the dozen-odd suitors who are eating her out of house and home and insisting on a marriage while husband Ulysses is having a series of adventures in trying to get home after sacking Troy. Perhaps the most disconcerting thing about "Ulysses" is that its English sound track has been dubbed in, and while the words (written no doubt by scriptwriters Irwin Shaw and Ben Hecht) have a high-flown Homeric tone, they don't fit the lip movements of the speakers, most of whom are Italian. This distracts considerably from the reality of the close-up scenes of which Director Mario Camerini gives us plenty.

Kirk Douglas makes a fine stalwart Ulysses, and Silvana Mangana is doubly beautiful since she plays both Penelope and Circe. The psychology behind this business of having the same actress play both the faithful wife and the irresistable enchantress is interesting, and I suppose Homer wouldn't object too much. Rossana Podesta is lovely as Nausicaa, the young princess who nurses the ship-wrecked Ulysses back to health. Most of the adventures are told in flashbacks while our amnesiac hero wonders who on earth he is. Greek scholars better steer clear of this "Ulysses," but kids will go for it—man and boy, men preferring the Circe incidents, and boys the terrifying Polyphemus episodes.

YOUNGSTERS will also go for "The Purple Mask," a hopped-up version of derring-do in France's stirring days of 1803. Tony Curtis plays the mysterious hero who acts like a fop in the daytime, but spends his nights rescuing noblemen from the guillotine. He annoys Napoleon no end, so Nap gets Dan O'Herlihy to trap Tony. All this works out with a lot of fancy sword-play and brave talk; but unfortunately there is too much talk for a sword-and-cloak drama, and so many disguises that the kids will have difficulty following the inane plot.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

COMMUNICATIONS

"THE CHILDREN OF POVERTY"

Montreal, Canada.

TO THE EDITORS: Thank you for publishing "The Children of Poverty" [June 17]. Their condition weighs heavily on the Christian conscience. It is imperative that we do something to help them. Immediate steps must be taken to break through the huge indifference of the comfortable. It is one of the marks of our time to fear poverty as we might fear a plague. We have grown to despise the poor—sometimes consciously, more often unconsciously. A false sense of security has blinded us to the presence of the downtrodden and dispossessed. It has blunted our sense of

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responsibility towards them. William James wrote that "the prevalent fear of poverty among the educated classes is the worst moral disease from which our civilization suffers."

This kind of civilization needs witnesses like Eileen Fantino. We need a whole army of prophets to rise up in righteous anger and recall the exacting law of God. We need prophets in the tradition of Amos who joined a natural gift of indignation to God's grace and reprimanded the people of Israel for their unjust oppression of the needy. The Lord swore through his prophet that the day would come when such people would "be lifted up on piles and what remained of them cast into boiling pots." (Amos 4, 2) That day came. And it will come again. For those with the courage to read the Gospels without skipping any pages, it is obvious that charity is at once the beginning and the end of Christianity. In Abbé Pierre's challenging definition, charity can only mean one thing: we serve those in greater need before we serve ourselves. Charity means, in still more direct language, that a Christian who has more than he needs is bound by all that is sacred in his religion to help those who do not have enough.

When our Blessed Lord said that we would always have the poor with us, He was not so much stating a fact as imposing an obligation. He was not approving poverty, He was rather disapproving excess riches. He was not making a concession to human weakness; He was challenging it. Poverty is a beautiful thing when it is embraced freely. It is a cruel and hideous thing when it is forced upon us.

BERNARD G. MURCHLAND, C.S.C.

THE WORKER-PRIESTS

Rome, Italy.

TO the Editors: In her criticism of my article on the Worker Priests [May 20] Mrs. Claire Huchet Bishop argues that the problem of the French worker-priests is complex even for Frenchmen in France, and all the more so for a non-Frenchman like myself who writes about it from Italy. She claims that many of my statements are "misleading," and says, moreover, that the situation can be fully understood only by someone who since childhood has been close to the French working class.

First of all, I should like to make it clear that although I am a Swede, France is my second fatherland. I was raised there under financial circumstances that compelled me to know the French working class at very close quarters, and, later, I took my degree there. Ever since then I have kept up the closest contacts with France, including contacts with the worker-priest movement. Like any other Catholic whose judgment is not marred by prejudice, I admire the worker priest movement. To write from Rome is not a handicap in these circumstances. In fact, the whole question has been handled and decided here in the very heart of the Catholic world. I thought, indeed, that a study of the question as seen from Rome might be of some interest to Commonweal readers.

I know the unfounded calumnies from Catholic quarters that the French worker-priests have been the victims of, and I know of the appalling lack of competence—if not actual ignorance—that sometimes exists in high places in Rome. I know priests escaped from the Communist world who are scandalized by all the opportunities missed by the Catholics in the West since the end of the war. They are convinced that many Catholic leaders and Princes of the Church have not the faintest idea of what Communism really is all about. In spite of all this I maintain that the pathetic "white book" of the French worker-priests shows better than anything else that Rome was right, when it finally spoke.

There is no contradiction, as Mrs. Claire Huchet Bishop says, between "the utter inner consecration" of the French worker-priests and the fact that they gained the workers' confidence by preaching the Christian commandment of social justice and often did so by joining the Communist trade unions. Their tragedy was that they had to compete with people consciously or even unconsciously in bad faith—the Communists—and always risked being accused of spreading "the opium of the people" if they preached resignation, which for many of the least of our brethren in the working class is the only possible solution, exactly as it is the only possible solution for the incurably sick. Resignation has often been misused by Christians who wished to conserve their privileges and to keep the lower classes quiet, but this does not mean that resignation is not a Christian virtue. Its most sublime example remains Job.

I think the great danger for the French worker-priests—and also for many of the intellectuals of the West—is to make a romantic overestimation of the proletariat. It is reminiscent of the overestimation the intellectuals of the French Revolution made, of the "noble savage." The proletarian and the savage are both our equals as human beings, but they are not a sort of super-race. I have often had to guard myself against romanticizing the proletariat, for such romanticizing is in the air, like an infectious intellectual fashion. And I find traces of it in Claire Huchet Bishop's letter. She says that she, an intellectual, has "the privilege" of being accepted as a friend by French manual workers. Why "the privilege?" They are our equals, as human beings: that's all and that's sufficient. We underestimated them for a long time and that was a danger. But to overestimate them is a danger, too. They are no worse nor better than you and me.

GUNNAR D. KUMLIEN.

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Humanity and Ideology in the Novel

THE SEIZURE OF POWER. By Czeslaw Milosz. Criterion. $3.50.

By MICHAEL HARRINGTON

UNDERSTANDABLY enough, politics have been the subject matter of a great many contemporary works of art. The line that divides them artistically is one indicated by George Bernard Shaw: whether or not their ideas, their ideology, is inextricably connected with and conditioned by their humanity.

Thus, Arthur Koestler wrote what was primarily a brilliant political analysis in *Darkness at Noon*: the characters in this novel moved in conformity to ideological, rather than human, necessities. The same is true, I think, of Victor Serge's *Case of Comrade Tulayev,* and a certain tendency in this direction mars the last two volumes of Manes Sperber's famous trilogy. On the other hand, there are novelists like Silone, Malraux or the Hemingway of *A Farewell to Arms* or *The Sun Also Rises*. These writers too are concerned with politics, with ideas, but the ideology in their work flows from the experience of their characters, and not vice versa. In the *Case of Comrade Tulayev,* the Old Bolshevik, warm and appealing as he is, exists essentially as a generalization; in *A Handful of Blackberries,* Pietro's politics are defined by his humanity and his experience.

I make these remarks because *The Seizure of Power* is a difficult book to discuss—and must be approached on several levels. For it lies, I think, somewhere between the two pure types of the art-dominated and the politics-dominated book. It is part journalism, part poetry, and part novel.

On the level of ideas, the preoccupations of this book are much the same as those of Milosz's earlier work, *The Captive Mind*. The central problem is to explain the relationship of intellectuals and artists to the Communist movement. There is the professor of history, the old socialist, the writers, the nationalist Catholic—all of them intellectuals. In analyzing their relation to Communism, Milosz is subtle and brilliant. He himself is a poet, and a former diplomat of the present Polish government.

One thing which distinguishes Milosz from many of the current political novelists is that he is still city-oriented. Silone, Sperber, Malraux, Camus, in their despairing reaction to the failure of the socialist working-class, focused upon the peasant as a sort of eternal figure of the passion for justice, of man's endurance. But Milosz is still very much of the city. This is where he finds his hope. Thus, he writes of one of his anti-Communist politicals: "He felt at ease with these people . . . By spitting, they emphasized their views on the absurdity of the destruction, on a new government taking over . . . . They kept silent about many things in their past and did not disclose their thoughts on the future."

This is Milosz's hope, and this further distinguishes him from many of the current political novelists who have lost that particular quality. On this level, of analyzing intellectuals, of stating the basis of his hope, he is as successful in *The Seizure of Power* as he was in *The Captive Mind*. If his novel were simply a political *roman a clef* one would judge it a complete success.

But *The Seizure of Power* intends to be more than this. It does not succeed, yet the very attempt, the fact that this is not *simply* an allegory, increases its value immeasurably. It gives us, for example, the poetic flash such as this: "Women were kneeling at the edges of the holes, looking down. At one of them Peter stopped to look. A bundle of old rags, the contorted outline of a body decomposing into a dirty mess with only the fair, sandy hair untouched by destruction. Long furrows on the woman's face, tears falling slowly. Antigone, still, searching across the centuries for her Polynices."

And so it is throughout the book: the artist constantly intrudes upon the ideologist. There are the insights, the snatches of humanity, the dimension deeper than politics, yet this quality is not sustained; it is not the informing principle of the book. One feels that the necessities of the ideas still predominate and form the main pattern of motivation. In this sense, *The Seizure of Power* fails of its full intention.

But if Milosz fails of his high purpose, it is still necessary to remark on another factor which modifies his failure. To a contemporary, a work of art which fails of greatness may still be of considerable significance: posterity, however, may be stricter. Precisely because the reader and the author are contemporary, there is often a powerful accidental communication of heart as well as mind—even in the case of the long-run failure. There is not that greatness which comes from the wedding of theme and act in Milosz's book; but it is still a sensitive, probing work, far better than most political novels, of somewhat imperfect realization but of significant intention and worth.

As a Frenchman Sees Us

AMERICA AT MID-CENTURY. By Andre Siegfried. Harcourt, Brace. $5.75.

By HENRY POPKIN

ANDRE SIEGFRIED'S psychological, political, and economic portrait of the United States is remarkable neither for its occasional insights nor for its generous share of misstatements, contradictions, anachronisms, and omissions. What is really remarkable is the consistency of the portrait; it is as fully and as significantly consistent as the characterization in a good work of fiction.

The portrait follows these lines: for reasons of geography, heredity, and historical accident, the American possesses great wealth which,

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in his matchless simplicity, he attributes to his moral superiority. He is as gullible as a child; the only political issues he understands are Party loyalty and a candidate's personality. (". . . the American electorate remains simple, of a simplicity almost childish, which is motivated by sentiment.") He is an enthusiastic "booster" who is always being taken in by crackpots and demagogues. This fact accounts for the prominence of the Ku Klux Klan, Dr. Townsend (who is represented as having a "pointed evangelical beard"), social credit, technocracy, Father Coughlin, and the more exotic types of Protestantism.

This account of American weakness is not subject to the usual laws of logic—or else American inconsistency has rubbed off on M. Siegfried. On Page 35 we are told that the American has "an almost pathological fear of invasion." But on Page 347 we are told that he is so foolish he does not think his cities are in danger of atomic attack.

Whether here or abroad, foreigners are anathema to the American, who especially enjoys "condemning the foreigner, for moral reprobation pleases him." His certainty of his manifest superiority to the European is the key to his foreign policy. ("It is not enough to say that Americans are proud of their country; they are all nationalists.") Instinctive isolationism caused the American to be unconcerned about World War II except as a period of domestic prosperity; instinctive hostility to Europe made the Asian campaign more popular. Admirable as its results have been, the Marshall Plan is the product of purely practical, not humanitarian, motives. This heartless American attitude toward European misfortune is in its way ironic, for American insistence on high protective tariffs has made a crucial contribution to European poverty. American innocence is partially to blame, since the American does not comprehend the effects of his economic policy.

The American's pleasure consists mainly of twice-weekly attendance at the movies. No comment needs to be made on literature, sports, or the mass media; radio and television are of interest only for their effect on politics. ("According to Sinclair Lewis, the monotony of the daily life of the little townships of the West is broken only by two events which open its windows toward a conception of the infinite: the passage of the train and the Catholic Mass." In spite of the present tense, the reference is to *Main Street,* published in 1920.) Even the Kinsey report does not suggest a capacity for pleasure but only the pervasiveness of the competitive spirit.

One source of the M. Siegfried's bias is easily discovered. *America at Mid-Century* is an expanded version of *America Comes of Age,* published in 1927. The new book follows the earlier interpretation of the decade of Prohibition when Puritanism—very loosely defined—seemed the dominant element. But even in 1927 there was some distortion. If M. Siegfried had paid more attention to F. Scott Fitsgerald and less to Sinclair Lewis and Bruce Barton, he would have been less inclined to emphasize the victory of conformity over pleasure. His information about the 1920's is drawn from such sources as Lewis's novels, Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows,* the Lynds' *Middletown,* and the inevitable Dayton "monkey trial." Curiously, much of this material does not appear in the earlier book. Except for a few pages about economic panaceas, M. Siegfried offers no comparable examination of the thirties and practically nothing about the cultural patterns of the forties and fifties.

Poor selection of evidence does not alone account for M. Siegfried's emphasis. He has reached his distinctive conclusions because he himself has the same moral preoccupation he finds in the American. He, too, wants people to get their just deserts. He must make America pay for its prosperity and for the poverty it has imposed on Europe. Its payment is in the joylessness of Puritanism and in the dullness of uniformity.

Prophets of Victorian Science

APES, ANGELS AND VICTORIANS: The Story of Darwin, Huxley and Evolution. By William Irvine. McGraw-Hill. $5.

By ANNE FREMANTLE

WHETHER a man believes that God exists or not, that He made us or we made Him, His removal from any one human being's horizon is the most momentous thing that can happen to that or any human being, and His removal from a society is, even sociologically, the most significant thing that can happen to that society.

Professor Irvine has emphasized this point, from his brilliant first chapter showing Thomas Huxley at his zenith, disposing of "Soapy Sam"—Bishop Wilberforce—in argument at Oxford, and carrying all before him in defense of the theory of evolution, to the last criticisms by the dying Huxley of Christianity as a moral idea. Professor Irvine shows Charles Darwin, humorous, dedicated, withdrawn, the ideal introvert; and Thomas Huxley, quick, scintillating, extrovert, whose war with religion was "essentially fratricidal, for he was a born preacher and sermonized from nearly every platform but the pulpit."

Charles Darwin, the gentle, thorough child, devoted to collecting, passionately attached to snipe-shooting, who "muddled into genius and greatness like a true Englishman" is wonderfully opposite to Huxley in type and temperament, and Professor Irvine has made the most of this unlikely Gilbert and Sullivan pair. He is very interesting about Darwin's health, which confined him to a sofa for most of his life, "recuperating from brief intervals of exercise or work." This condition has been pronounced psychopathic, the result of a dominating father and elder sister. Certainly, during the five years' cruise of *The Beagle* Darwin managed to

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work fifteen hours a day, and stave off starvation by chain smoking!

But later, even the face-to-face encounter between what he discovered about life and what he had been taught about it, was forever avoided. Later in life, he explained to a clergyman that physical weakness had prevented his from feeling "equal to deep reflection on the deepest subject which can fill a man's mind." When he married, most happily, the thirty-year-old Emma Wedgewood, "the perfect nurse had married the perfect patient."

"The most important book of the century" is Professor Irvine's chapter title when discussing *The Origin of Species*. But, looking back, was it? Has not Marx's *Capital* edged it out? It is interesting to read how little Darwin cared that several people had discovered his theory of natural selection before him. When re-reading his own book for a second French edition in 1865 he wrote: "Upon my life, it is a very good book, but o my gracious, it is tough reading." His son described his sensitivity: "I used to like to hear him admire the beauty of a flower; it was a kind of gratitude to the flower itself, and a personal love for its delicate form and color."

It would be a great blessing if Professor Irvine would learn to prune his style. Perhaps he feels that the quiet, domestic, sedentary lives led by his protagonists require gingering up: whatever the reason, he is forever jazzing up his prose. Man "leered mockingly with imponderables and intangibles, and towered awfully with a vast accumulation of data." Darwin's "pattern was essentially crustacean." Huxley began as "an industrious scientific caterpillar" . . . then "burst miraculously forth into a gorgeous literary and philosophic butterfly . . . describing all sorts of wayward arabesques in the soft dreamy airs of speculation." Huxley is rather lost in all his language, and Beatrice Webb seems to encompass him more truly in her quiet diary entry for May 6, 1886, in a paragraph that ends "Huxley is greater as a man than as a scientific thinker."

Yet, this is a magnificent book, and most of all because Professor Irvine shows how Huxley, facing reality even in himself, despite the hurt, and Darwin, fleeing it, each found exactly what he sought: Huxley, some aspects of interior Truth, and Darwin, gentle comfort and a most peaceful death.

Popular Culture

EXCELSIOR! By Paul Hyde Bonner. Scribner's. $3.50.

By CHANDLER BROSSARD

Edmund Wilson once said that Somerset Maugham's novels were not "written"—meaning that their prose was little better than journalism, and that the main idea behind each book existed merely to keep the story going. The novels lacked density and depth, supplying the reader, instead, with a glibness and facile point of view with which he could easily identify himself. Wilson's comment has pertinence here

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because Mr. Bonner's writing comes pretty directly out of the Maugham school of pseudo-serious popular fiction, and his latest novel is not "written" either. It is merely "talked."

Excelsior is a perfect example of the pseudo-serious popular genre. It deals with a very rich, very powerful Swiss banking family during the early years of the last war. The characters are fairly stock: Grosspapa Eggli, the old but extraordinarily energetic head of the family who runs everything with a very high, but intelligent hand; his beautiful, brilliant, much younger mistress, the Baroness de Marty; his two sons Walter and Jacques, the latter an Americanized weakling, the former a competent but utterly emasculated bore; and various minor characters who provide the book with a chic, international-set tone.

The book is supposed to be, on the "serious" level, about the fascinating relations between all these people; on another level, the popular one, I suppose, it is about how the family bank, in the form of Grosspapa Eggli, survives all kinds of pressures and remains intact—the main pressure being the attempts various people, including one of his sons, make to discover what the bank is going to do with its funds, now that war has broken out. Old Eggli has never been wrong about world affairs, and knowing his secrets, or following his leads, is like buying General Motors stock. The book has only one element of real interest: will the son Jacques, who is now in the OSS, succeed in learning, or stealing, the bank's secrets?

In other words, the book is actually a sort of who-will-do-it. The novel's other elements are simply so much decoration, or sheer nonsense. The family characters and their intramural machinations are rigged and empty; nobody changes in relation to anyone else, and they pursue their destinies, (or fashionable behaviorism) with an almost catatonic rigidity. Not one of them —with the exception of the old man—acts with any sense of immediacy or intelligence. This is fine for Mr. Bonner because it makes his characters easier to manipulate as puppets, but it is dreary and insulting to a reader who wants something for his money.

Mr. Bonner's book is interesting only because it shows how a once lively, self-respecting and validly entertaining genre has become corrupted by literariness and general confusion of purpose. Popular culture has never been given such a bad time as it has these last few years at the hands of writers like Paul Bonner. They almost make us yearn for the Vicki Baums and the Taylor Caldwells—for mediocrity that pretends to nothing more.

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